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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 DUBAI 000423

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: MOHAMMED GERGAWI DISCUSSES MBR FOUNDATION

REF: A) STATE 87911, B) ABU DHABI 949, C) DUBAI 363

CLASSIFIED BY: Paul R Sutphin, Consul General, Dubai, UAE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: UAE Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Mohammed Gergawi discussed potential areas of cooperation between the USG, U.S. educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and the Mohammad Bin Rashid Foundation (MbRF) in a 90 minute meeting with the Ambassador and Consul General June 26 (Refs A and B). Gergawi stressed the MbRF's initial focus on education and its broad scope, which will include programs in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia. He outlined several ideas for programs focused on graduate and business studies, including bringing students to Dubai to see first-hand a regional success story. He again emphasized his desire for close -- but indirect -- cooperation and coordination with the USG. The Ambassador presented the non-paper of potential areas of cooperation (ref A); Gergawi was enthusiastic and said his people would review the document. He particularly requested USG assistance in encouraging U.S. universities and institutions to work with the MbRF, and to assist with visas for students traveling to the U.S. on MbRF scholarships when that time came. U.S. consulting firm Booz Allen will work over the summer with the Dubai government's Executive Office (which reports directly to Gergawi) to develop a strategy for MbRF activities, with the goal of a public presentation in September 2007 (likely in the weeks before Ramadan). Citing the stalled effort to establish a 4000-student University of Connecticut campus in Dubai's Academic City project, Gergawi also made a strong pitch for USG assistance in encouraging a quality U.S. university to set up a large campus in Dubai, citing the potential positive political impact. Post will continue to engage MbRF planners over the summer to assist in matchmaking with U.S. universities, NGOs and foundations, as well as to discuss other potential areas of cooperation (see Para 16). End Summary.

Booz Allen and Executive Office to Shape MbRF's Strategy

12. (C) Gergawi, a principal advisor to MbR as well as head of parastatal Dubai Holdings, put the MbRF at the top of his (extensive) list of duties, noting "I am ready to drop everything else to take this forward." He was upbeat about the MbRF's future and the possibility for unofficial cooperation with the USG; he made a point of noting he had come to the meeting alone both to facilitate open discussion and ensure the dialogue remained private regarding USG ideas. Describing the MbRF's "big picture" goals, he underscored the overall objective is to "elevate minds through education and culture" and to "create people who would become future leaders" throughout the Arab and Muslim world. He said Booz Allen would be working closely with MbR's Executive Office (a Gergawi creation modeled on the Executive Office of the President) to develop the MbRF's strategy and program over the summer.

Financing: Harvard Endowment as Model

13. (C) Regarding MbRF financing, Gergawi confirmed that part of Dubai Holding's assets would be reallocated to create the MbRF's

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\$10b endowment. The MbRF's recently-named Chief Financial Officer, Fadhil al Ahli, and a team from the Executive Office had just returned from a trip to the U.S. to meet with the administrators of Harvard's endowment, including Ahmed al-Aryan. The MbRF would seek a similar structure and returns on its money; Gergawi said the Harvard endowment's investments had returned almost 20 percent growth consistently on a yearly basis. The MbRF will target spending 8-12% of its assets each year on programs.

Broad Outreach Planned

14. (C) Gergawi discussed the ambitious scope of the Foundation's target area. While it would initially focus on the Middle East, the MbRF's work would soon reach into most countries with large Muslim populations in Asia, South Asia and Africa, both North and Sub-Saharan; as an example, he named Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sudan, Mauretania, Tanzania, Niger and Chad. Gergawi also noted that the MbRF would not/not be working in Saudi Arabia, which he deemed as too much of a "political problem." He also noted that no decision has been made about working in Afghanistan, where the same concerns exist; the Ambassador underscored the great need there.

Brainstorming with the U.S.

15. (C) The Ambassador emphasized the USG's enthusiasm for the

goals of the MbRF, noting that the time is right to begin a dialogue on program ideas for the MbRF's consideration. She presented the non-paper (Ref A), and reviewed a number of the suggestions in it, including education exchanges, technology development, curriculum development, schools, book translations, media, business development and volunteerism. Gergawi responded positively to the overall U.S. approach, but did not address any of the ideas in detail. He was particularly enthusiastic about the translation of books into Arabic. He emphasized that "we need your help" in encouraging U.S. universities, NGOs and other institutions (such as charitable foundations) with similar goals to work with the MbRF.

16. (C) Given Gergawi's reminder that the MbRF wanted to avoid direct collaboration with the USG or any foreign government (Ref B), the Ambassador emphasized the USG sought to help the MbRF "brainstorm" and make contact with appropriate and effective educational and non-governmental organizations.

17. (C) The Ambassador noted many of the organizations listed in the non-paper have done very successful work independent of the USG or any other government, in challenging environments such as Yemen, Egypt and Tunisia. The Ambassador emphasized that the USG intention was to make it clear that we wanted to support the MbRF's efforts and informally facilitate contacts with excellent programs that were in synch with the Foundation's goals. (Comment: Gergawi is focused on the "big picture" issues regarding the foundation; the Mission and Washington will need to follow up with the members of MbR's Executive Office and the Booz Allen team as they work to put the flesh of ideas on the MbRF's firm financial bones. End comment)

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An Emphasis on Education

18. (C) Gergawi said he was convinced that the most important effort the MbRF can undertake in its start up phase is to focus on improving educational opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged youth. The overarching principle is to "elevate people to a higher level"; he hoped the Foundation's work would be a positive benchmark for other countries to follow. The Ambassador posited, and Gergawi agreed, that education and job opportunities are key to combating the spread of radicalism. Gergawi also emphasized that education would help foster "healthy competition" within the Muslim world.

19. (C) Gergawi said a key part of the MbRF's strategy will be to provide post-graduate scholarships to promising young people throughout the Muslim world in business and government. Students would attend institutions in the west and in the region, including the Dubai School of Government. Gergawi commented that bringing students to Dubai provides them with a first hand look at a regional success story - he said Dubai wanted to be a good model for young people to take back to their countries, particularly its openness, tolerance and focus on hard work.

110. (C) The MbRF would fund other types of university scholarships, focusing on deserving but needy students as well as those identified as potential leaders. Students would apply directly to select universities and, once accepted, the Foundation would pay their tuition. Gergawi asked the Ambassador

to consider how students bound for the U.S. (from the many countries in which the MbRF would work) could be assisted in moving through the visa process successfully. The Ambassador responded that this would be an important aspect of USG/MbRF coordination in the future. Asked by the Ambassador, Gergawi said the MbRF was very much interested in working with the USG to identify appropriate U.S. universities and other academic institutions to work with the MbRF.

¶11. (C) Gergawi indicated potential education-related areas for MbRF funding included using NGOs to help train school teachers, focusing on the sciences. There would also be a special emphasis on providing assistance to Palestinian refugees in camps in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Assisting MBA Students Become Business People

¶12. (C) Gergawi said that programs that foster job creation would be a strong priority for the MbRF. One such program under consideration is a British scheme that provides MBA students with loans to both fund their studies and subsequently start their own businesses. The students either pay the money back or engage in joint ventures with the loan provider upon completion of the MBA. He also said funding universities to provide business internships is under consideration.

Dubai: Seeking the Next Great Regional American University

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¶13. (C) Apart from the MbRF discussion, Gergawi asked the Ambassador and the CG for help in bringing American universities to the UAE. The Dubai government would like to see a "large campus" rather than the "small-scale" ventures other American universities had opened in the region. Citing the overwhelming regional demand for quality American education, he hoped a new university would be able to accommodate 4000-5000 students.

¶14. (C) Gergawi voiced frustration with, but Dubai's continuing interest in, the University of Connecticut's now-stalled plans to open a large campus in Dubai's Academic City (now under construction). He said he hoped Senator Lieberman and Abe Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League -- two recent visitors to Dubai -- would help win over those in the Connecticut government who raised objections (based on the UAE's official policy of not admitting Israel passport holders to the country). On that point, he noted Dubai had made an agreement with Harvard Medical School, in the context of its work in Dubai Healthcare City (DHC), to accept students from anywhere in the world. (Note: Harvard Medical International (HMI) is a partner with Tatweer, the developer of Healthcare City; HMI accredits DHC medical personnel and is also working with Tatweer to develop a teaching hospital. Tatweer is part of the Dubai Holdings group, headed by Gergawi. End note.)

¶15. (C) Gergawi said he was personally enthusiastic about further cooperation between Dubai and U.S. universities, and urged the U.S. to use its "soft power" -- strength in education

-- to produce a positive impact in the region in the future. He is convinced that "if the U.S. were to open the door (by helping with the establishment of a large US university), people would inevitably come to study" in Dubai from throughout the region, including Syria, Iran and Iraq. This would have an important positive and liberalizing impact. As a product of the U.S. university system, he said his first choice for university education would always be the U.S., but that Dubai may have to look elsewhere if U.S. universities were hesitant. He cited the recent, rapid establishment of an executive MBA program in the Dubai International Financial Center by the London School of Business; the program's student target for its first year was 30, but more than 200 students are now enrolled.

Post Recommendations

¶16. (C) The message from Gergawi remained clear and strongly positive: He wants the MbRF to work with the USG closely, but not directly or overtly. With Booz Allen working to flesh out the next steps for the MbRF, we believe the time is ripe to engage directly with the MbRF strategists who will be working on specific programs and proposals. We suggest the following key steps:

-- Overall consultations in Washington: The Ambassador suggested Gergawi and other Foundation leaders (and likely Booz Allen consultants) come to Washington and meet the key Department and USG interlocutors over the summer to kick off the process of coordination, and possibly review in detail the ideas provided in the non-paper. Gergawi thought this was a good idea, and said that he might travel to the U.S. in August himself.

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-- University matchmaking: Gergawi particularly emphasized the MbRF's desire to have USG support in identifying appropriate U.S. university partners, and encouraging them to work with the MbRF (and to set up in a campus in Dubai). We believe that responding to this request, perhaps through R, is an excellent opportunity for the Department to establish a record of successful indirect coordination with the MbRF.

-- Facilitating engagement with possible U.S. NGOs and foundation partners: The Ambassador stressed U/S Hughes and her office were keen to work with the MbRF to help create and support linkages to potential U.S. NGO, foundation and private sector partners.

-- Gergawi responded positively to both the idea of matchmaking and help regarding linking up with U.S. NGOs and foundations. We will follow up with him and the Executive Office on next steps and a possible visit by an MbRF team to Washington.

SUTPHIN